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FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

A Series of
Dramatizations
of Better
Land Use

No. 128 October 5, 1940 1:15 p.m.

"OSAGE FARMS"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio

SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Out in the great agricultural plain of the Mississippi Valley, out beyond Saint Louis and Cape Girardeau, down at the foot of the Ozar Mountains, lies Missouri. Here is a state of rugged hills and peaceful valleys, long gentle slopes and fertile farmlands, lead and zinc mines, corn cob pipes.

ORGAN: Sneak in MISSOURI WALTZ.

ANNOUNCER

This is Missouri: land of Jesse James and Kansas City's famous livestock markets, land of John J. Pershing and Missouri mules, land of Representative W. D. Vandiver who told Congress, "I am not easily taken in. I am on the alert against deception. You've got to show me. I'm from Missouri."

ORGAN: Up and out.

ANNOUNCER

Pettis County, Missouri, is the scene of a great agricultural pioneering project, the Osage Farms project operated by the Farm Security Administration. And Pettis County was named for a great pioneer, Spencer Pettis. In 1831, Spencer Pettis was seeking reelection to Congress....(fade).

SOUND: Clock strikes three...

SOUND: Loud crash, as man breaks door open...

PETTIS (sleepily)

What in...what's the meaning...what's going on here? Oh...

BIDDLE

Get up, Spencer...or shall I drag you out of there?

PETTIS

What's the meaning of this outrage, sir? Oh, it's you, Thomas Biddle.

BIDDLE

At your service, my dear, dear Spencer.

PETTIS

What right have you breaking into my room this night? Get out!

BIDDLE

Not so fast, my oratorical friend. I want words with you.

PETTIS

And I'll have none with you, sir.

BIDDLE

Or would you care to have a taste of this rawhide whip? A persuader, you might call it.

PETTIS

What do you want, this time of night?

BIDDLE

My dear Spencer, ever since President Jackson began making war on the United States bank, you have been most critical of the bank, and, I might add, my brother Nicholas Biddle, the president of the bank in Philadelphia.

PETTIS

That I have, and will continue to do so. I am a strong supporter of our president, and this act in particular.

BIDDLE

And that letter you wrote to the newspapers, I hardly need tell you, was not so neighborly.

PETTIS

I didn't mean it so. I am opposed to the bank, Major Biddle...I am opposed to the financial policies of your brother, and sir, if I may add, I am very much opposed to your presence in my room.

BIDDLE (deliberately and bitterly)

Spencer Pettis, you are going to get the thrashing of your life.

PETTIS

You wouldn't dare.

BIDDLE

Oh, wouldn't I?

SOUND: Lashing of rawhide whip...cries of pain...

BIDDLE

Take that...and that....and THAT!! AND THAT!!!

ORGAN: UP IN SWELL TO DROWN OUT CRIES, then fade out...

PETTIS (softly)

So you see, Senator Benton, I have accepted your advice to avoid any action until after election. But now I have been reelected... Missouri's only representative in Congress. And now, sir, I am sending this challenge to Major Biddle....(fade)

BIDDLE (reading, fading in)

...sunrise, on Bloody Island, to meet me on the field of honor...

ORGAN: Mournful music...

SECOND

Are you ready, gentlemen?

BIDDLE

Ready.

PETTIS

Ready.

ORGAN: Music softly rising....

SOUND: Two pistol shots, almost simultaneous...

ORGAN: Up behind announcer....

ANNOUNCER

Thus passed two brave men, each dying for his convictions. Young Spencer Pettis passed on in the bloom of young manhood, with the future of a useful career ahead. For him, Pettis County, Missouri was named...a county of 450 thousand acres of undulating prairie, bearing a great depth of remarkably rich soil.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

Pioneers settling Pettis County found rich farmlands. And in 1937, a new kind of pioneer was working in the hills of the Ozarks, between the Little Black and the St. Francis. His name, Ray Abboy.

SOUND: Hoe chopping in hard soil...

RAY

Sakes alive, it's hot, Allie. Where's that water pail?

ALLIE

Over here.

RAY

Oh, yeah.

SOUND: Dipper dipped into bucket, and man drinks...

RAY

7 This heat's killing me.

ALLIE

I wouldn't so much mind the heat, if 't weren't that I'm about fed up with choppin' cotton. Oh, it's not the hard work, Ray. It's just that we never have anything left for all our trouble. Look at the girls, there...hoein' in the hot sun...and what for? Will they ever have anything better'n that?

RAY

I know how you feel, Allie. Rentin' cotton land on shares doesn't get you anywhere. First place, it's a one crop system we're following, and it just don't work. And then, here on the bottom it overflows and you never know whether you'll have to plant once or three times. And when the high water does come, why it just brings silt and mud and stones and gravel.

ALLIE

Don't take a smart person to see why. The good soil's already washed out of the hills.

RAY

I never was much of a farmer, you know that...but I know one thing for certain, these Ozark hills never were meant for cotton, or for corn either. They should've left 'em in trees.

ALLIE

Our corn patches in the bottom aren't much better.

RAY

Oh, now, they're some better, Allie. We always call this 20-bushel land.

ALLIE

Yes, you call it that, but...

RAY

Allie, there's one thing I've been aiming to mention to you.

ALLIE

What's that?

RAY

I was reading in the Kansas City paper where they're starting one of those Farm Security places up in Pettis County. I kinda thought that maybe...

ALLIE (eagerly, then lapsing into hopelessness)

Pettis County? Oh, Ray, if only...but then, that would be too good for us. We're poor folks.

RAY

It's supposed to be for poor folks, to help 'em get started. Near as I can tell from the newspaper article, the government will buy up the land, and lease it to deserving farmers who'll handle it the right way.

ALLIE

Oh, Ray...if only we could.

RAY

There's one way to find out, Allie. And I'm going to do it.

ORGAN: SINGING IN THE RAIN.

ANNOUNCER

Oh, it was a happy day for Ray Abbey and his wife when they moved onto their newly-leased farm in the Osage Farms project of the Farm Security Administration. And these are happy days, too...as they look out over their farm, a conservation farm...

RAY

Kinda seems like a long time ago, doesn't it?

ALLIE

And we have our third crop already.

RAY

I guess most of the other families here were just about like us. Down in Ripley County it was just cotton, cotton, cotton...and a little corn if we didn't drown out. But here we've got our pigs and chickens and cows, and plenty of feed for them--corn, barley, soybeans, lespedeza. We've got security.

ALLIE

We've got soil security, too. See those terraces runnin' across the field there? Look nice, don't they?

RAY

Sure do. I ought to like 'em. I helped build 'em.

ALLIE

And when we came here, there were gullies in that field. We saw what soil washin' could do to land down in Ripley County.

RAY

That's why I made up my mind we'd terrace and contour farm and keep our fields under cover. When you see soil washing in your fields, you do a heap of figgerin'. And all my figgerin's been on how to keep our soil at home. America needs this soil, Allie.

ORGAN: SINGING IN THE RAIN (up and out).

ANNOUNCER

That is the true story of how Ray Abbey found farm security and soil security in Pettis County, Missouri. And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Gene Charles.

CHARLES

Thanks, _____. Next Monday is Missouri Day, and a lot of the folks in the "Show Me" state will be celebrating that annual affair...but personally, I think that Ray Abbey will be celebrating the time he signed a lease on his farm in the Osage Farms project.. and the time he built his first terraces.

ANNOUNCER

Then that wasn't just a pretty speech we heard credited to Ray Abbey a minute ago--they really do have terraces in the Osage Farms project.

CHARLES

They certainly do, _____. Why, on that little 80-acres of Ray Abbey's, practically every acre is terraced for soil conservation. And terraced right, too. Big, broad-base terraces with fine wide outlets, shaped and vegetated long before the terraces were built and cut in. Another thing, he didn't have that advantage of the bulletin on terracing, either.

ANNOUNCER

I don't believe I've seen that bulletin either, Gene. What's it like?

CHARLES

Well, if you want to know what terraces are like, how to build them, when to build them, how to build the outlets, where to build the outlets...in general, if you want to know all about terraces, this bulletin is the answer.

ANNOUNCER

And I know the answer to a question many folks might ask: if you want a copy of the bulletin on terracing, send a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio.

CHARLES

That's the address, Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio, and just ask for the bulletin on terracing. And in addition, we'll send you another bulletin, a new one on terrace outlets in particular.

ANNOUNCER

Now, getting back to Pettis County, Gene...I thought that the land there was mostly fairly level...or at least gently undulating. I shouldn't think those farmers would have much of an erosion control problem.

CHARLES

I guess you're just laboring under a false impression, _____ because that's likely to be the very kind of land that does wash. To begin with, the soil there--technically, I believe, it's Summit silt loam--the soil is highly erodible. In addition to that, those gently undulating slopes that you've heard about are long ones. They catch a barrel of water, and then some, and it's likely to be rushing down the slope, leaving little gullies behind unless....

ANNOUNCER

Unless you terrace, I suppose?

CHARLES

Yes, and follow other soil-saving practices. Fortunately, the soil there is fairly deep. It isn't underlaid with rock close to the surface, so--as soil conservationists say--it's good soil for terracing. That's one reason why about 3,000 acres of the original 5,000 in Osage Farms project have been terraced.

ANNOUNCER

Say, will you elaborate on that Osage Farms project...what's it like?

CHARLES

Well, it's one of the Farm Security Administration projects where the government has bought up land and helped needy farmers to support themselves. Some of their clients have actually come off relief rolls, and many of them were working for WPA.

ANNOUNCER

Uncle Sam gives them farm land instead of food or wages...is that the idea?

CHARLES

No, the idea is to give them a new start toward self dependence. Having purchased the land, the Farm Security Administration lends the needy farm family enough to get started farming again on a modest basis--three sows, 8 or 10 cows, three head of work stock, and about 150 hens--that's the average layout, plus a good garden. The government, as land owner, provides simple but comfortable homes and other farm buildings designed for efficient operation.

ANNOUNCER

How many farmers are there like this in the Osage Farms project of Pottis County, Missouri.

CHARLES

About 60 now, _____, although some additional land will be acquired to accommodate something like 30 more within a year or so. They have a couple of interesting cooperative farming enterprises there. In one of them, the Hillview Corporation, ten families farm about 600 acres on a cooperative farming proposition. In another one, the Bois d'Arc Corporation, 21 families work about two thousand acres.

ANNOUNCER

That sounds like an interesting experiment. How do they divide the profits, if any?

CHARLES

Just like any corporation would. Everyone has certain work to do. Each farmer has more or less a speciality. Each family gets plenty of butter, eggs, garden truck, and so on.

ANNOUNCER

Now, getting back to soil conservation, would you say that these Farm Security farmers are treating their land right...that is, in addition to the terracing you mentioned a moment ago?

CHARLES

Yes, I would...and here's why: remember, the federal government owns this land and you can be sure Uncle Sam wants to keep it in good shape. The manager of Osage Farms, J. A. Muster, is an experienced farmer and a former county agricultural agent. He knows the value of holding the soil. He recommends that his clients use a soil-building and soil-holding crop rotation. They use small grains, lespedeza, and soybeans to keep the land covered the year around. On their terraced fields they farm with the terraces, that is, on the contour or on the level. Jerry Vardeman, President of the Bois d'Arc corporation, emphasized that. Other farmers in the county also use these methods. Their county agricultural agent recommends such methods. So, _____, I think we're safe in saying that farmers of Pettis County, Missouri, are becoming soil conservation conscious, and that they are going to do what is necessary to maintain those undulating prairies that the historians describe as "bearing a great depth of remarkably rich soil."

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

CHARLES (on cue)

Remember, if you want copies of the two bulletins on terracing, send a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. This is Gene Charles, speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, saying goodbye until next week at this same time, when once again we bring you a story of "Fortunes Washed Away."

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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